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Perspectives

A MAGAZINE FOR MEMBERS OF THE ASSOCIATION OF FRATERNITY/SORORITY ADVISORS

aPerspectives

A MAGAZINE FOR MEMBERS OF THE ASSOCIATION OF FRATERNITY/SORORITY ADVISORS

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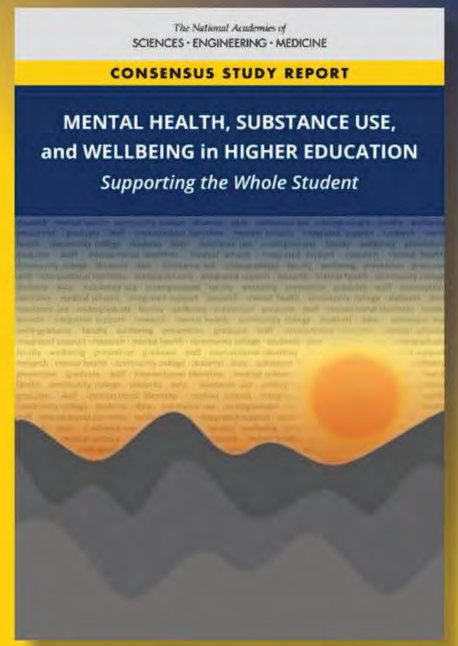
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Perspectives is the official publication of the Association of Fraternity/Sorority Advisors, Inc. (AFA). Views expressed are those of the individual authors/contributors/advertisers and are not necessarily those of the Association. AFA encourages the submission of articles, essays, ideas, and advertisements.

Submissions should be directed to the editor, advertising queries to the staff.

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FROM THE EDITORS

At the Annual Meeting in 2019, the editorial team for Perspectives announced the publication would be forgoing issues based on themes and pivoting to a broader, more holistic magazine to serve the needs of the association's members. For many of you, this might the first time you realize Perspectives is no longer themed and you can finally write that article you have always been thinking about but never fit within the themes generated by the editorial board. We hope you can now get that idea out into the profession. As leadership for the magazine transitioned, we reflected on the content the editorial team was able to generate in collaboration with many stellar authors given everything else going on around us. If you couldn't read Perspectives in 2020 like you had before due to the pandemic, we hope you are able to find time to return to those issues.

As Tyler and I began our roles earlier this year, we thought about ways we could streamline the publication and continue to ensure it is best serving AFA. Two initial changes bubbled up from this conversation. Moving forward, you can expect to see three issues of the magazine per year, a spring, summer, and winter edition; accordingly, our hope with this change is to engage more authors, find new voices to contribute to the publication, and better reflect the peaks and valleys of busy seasons within fraternity/sorority advising. Article submission for the winter edition will be October 1, 2021 — recognizing that it is a large ask for many fraternity/sorority professionals to write a full-length article any later in the fall. Additionally, the "What's Your Perspective" section has been reimagined. Previously, members would be asked to weigh in on a topic to be featured in the next issue, but it was often difficult to gather this content. Starting with the summer issue, we now look forward to hearing from members about what they took from an article in the previous issue: how was your professional practice impacted, what long-held belief were challenged, or what new questions do you have after reading the issue? For many authors, putting their thoughts and words out for the association to consume is daunting. However, we know great conversations are happening through this labor, and we can't wait to read about how you are engaging with the publication. (Think about this as a Tweet or a two-three Tweet thread.)

As we continue to wade through what will hopefully be our country's transitionary period out of the COVID-19 pandemic, many things will still be in flux for some time. Higher education and the sorority/fraternity world will also have many challenges and opportunities in the months and possibly years to come. We are reminded of a quote from the late, great fashion icon Karl Lagerfeld, "Change is the healthiest way to survive." While Lagerfeld was maybe thinking of the winds of change within the fashion industry, it applies to our current experience. It feels like higher education and the fraternity/sorority experience are currently on the precipice of monumental change and positive growth, but it could be just as likely to slip back into our old patterns from the pre-COVID world. We hope that Perspectives can be a resource and space for sorority/fraternity professionals to push towards that next phase in our existence. From creating more just and anti-racist environments, forging better partnerships within our industry, and blending the best parts of our COVID existence with the pre-COVID world for our institutions and organizations, as a few starters. The work within fraternity/sorority advising might be more important now than ever.

For 2021, Perspectives will continue to be published in a fully online format. Articles typically range from 800-2,000 words and follow AP style. While you will find scholarly pieces within the publication, this is not a requirement. Your experiences, skills, and knowledge from spending day in and day out with sorority/fraternity members is more than welcome and encouraged! Please also feel free to reach out to workshop ideas, ask questions, and learn more. Articles and reflections on previous issues can be submitted to rdm9493@gmail.com and tyler.f.havens@gmail.com to be considered within the publication's review process.

Tyler Havens & Ryan Miller
AFA Perspectives Editors

Letter from the President

Chris Graham

Normal. Pivot. Patience. Justice. Grace. These are a few words that come to mind when I think about the world we have all navigated since March of 2020.

I shared during a recent board meeting that I'm striving to move away from the language "return to normal" for a range of reasons. First, I am not sure I can or should set the standard for what our lives should or could be like daily, but I also can't define that either. Secondly, I am not so sure "normal" was working for far too many of us to begin with. And lastly, many of our lives will never be the same. A "return to normal" seems to disrespect the lives lost, lessons learned, and growth that we have experienced individually and collectively.

However, holding on to my perspective and view of the world has helped me stay sane. I'm often asked why do I serve as a director of fraternity/sorority life and how do I continue to do this very challenging job? I often answer that keeping a balanced perspective has allowed me to endure the highs and lows of this work and our world. Perspective has a Latin root meaning "look through" or "perceive," and all the meanings of perspective have something to do with looking. As I have studied this word, I continue to reflect on a few questions that might influence our work.

1. How might our perspective impact our view of those we serve and work with?
2. How might the way we view others limit or expand our opportunities?
3. When do we pause and challenge ourselves to listen, consider, and learn from other perspectives?
4. What perspectives in our profession challenge us the most? Why? When? And how might we lean into that discomfort to question our assumptions or edify our beliefs?

I understand our socio-political climate challenges the notion that we should or could consider other perspectives, but I invite us to do so; I learn most when I do just that. To this end, I hope you enjoy and learn from our colleagues that took time to share their talent and perspectives with us. I am grateful for and appreciate each of them!

My best,

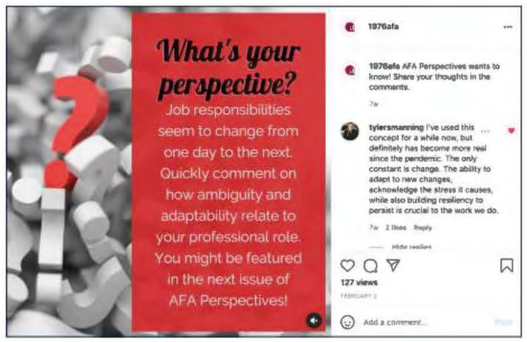
Chris Graham

What's Your Perspective?

Job responsibilities seem to change from one day to the next. Quickly comment on how ambiguity and adaptability relate to your professional role.

Tyler S. Manning
@tylersmanning

I've used this concept for a while now, but definitely has become more real since the pandemic. The only constant is change. The ability to adapt to new changes, acknowledge the stress it causes, while also building resiliency to persist is crucial to the work we do.


What's your perspective?
Job responsibilities seem to change from one day to the next. Quickly comment on how ambiguity and adaptability relate to your professional role. You might be featured in the next issue of AFA Perspectives!
1976afa
1976afa AFA Perspectives wants to know! Share your thoughts in the comments.
tylersmanning I've used this concept for a while now, but definitely has become more real since the pandemic. The only constant is change. The ability to adapt to new changes, acknowledge the stress it causes, while also building resiliency to persist is crucial to the work we do.
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Contribute to AFA Perspectives!

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PIVOT!

NEW RESPONSIBILITIES OF A NEW JOB

MEAGAN HAGERTY

None of us will ever have to struggle to answer questions about adaptability in an interview ever again; although, I've heard some employers are already changing the question to "Other than 2020, give us an example of a time when you've had to adapt?" Which seems unfair.

We've adapted. We've pivoted. We've lived through unprecedented times. If you're like me, you're sick of hearing these phrases. If you're really like me, every time someone says pivot you replay the couch scene from "Friends" in your head where Ross yells, "Pivot. Pivot! PI-VOT!"

I was hired to do in-person event planning, which was to include traveling to perform site visits, six business days before going into a statewide lockdown. I have essentially had to adapt every aspect of my work, starting with creating a home office without a budget and without knowing if this would be used exclusively for two weeks, two months, or longer (as we're now going on over a year). Instead, I haven't left my house for work since March 2020, and the largest event of our year just happened virtually. I can't tell you how many times I've said to my boss, "This isn't what you hired me for, and I'm not sure I'm good at it." Although they tell me how great I'm doing at making the adjustments and applying the skills I have to this new kind of problem solving, the imposter syndrome is hitting me 15 years into my career. I can only imagine how new professionals are feeling, as they try to navigate their first professional positions while surviving a pandemic and convincing themselves they can do this.

My advice? Let yourself grieve for what was supposed to be. I am infinitely sad I am not traveling for work. I should be in Florida as I write this, and as a Minnesotan, I would have loved a work trip to Florida in November. You have to let yourself be sad about the parts of your job you were excited for that are no more, but don't dwell on it. Grieve for it, and then focus on the skills you have that will help make you successful in your actual job, not the one you thought you'd be doing when they hired you.

This isn't just about the pandemic. At any moment, we could all be in a job we weren't expecting. Which is to say, I've been here before. I accepted a job in April of 2018 where I was supposed to be doing student staff recruitment, training, and leadership development with some light curriculum design for a class of about 150 students. My colleague left in December, and I suddenly was solely responsible for curriculum design for two fully online classes of over 2500 students. I had done minimal curriculum design before, none of which was for an online class. If you've ever been an instructor, you'll know that in-person pedagogy is very different than fully online. But, I dug in, and I adapted. I used my resources on campus, took every training I could, and befriended someone who worked intimately with our learning management system. I built a new skill set. If you can approach something with that attitude, the desire to better yourself and to always be learning something new, it can help you get through some of these shifts. It can be exhausting and frustrating. Embracing the new challenge may open up different opportunities for future searches sooner than expected.

This isn't just about the pandemic. At any moment, we could all be in a job we weren't expecting.

The upside of all this? You get to take the new skills you've learned with you. You didn't plan on developing them, and you may not even have wanted them. Now that you have them, no one can take them away from you. Consider this: if you were asked to take on all these new responsibilities you feel like you had no idea how to do, that means someone saw you had the ability to shift, pivot, learn, and be successful in something new. Allow yourself the confidence they have in you. Keep learning, keep growing, and keep going!

Meagan Hagerty
NACADA
Chair of the Emerging Leaders Program Advisory Board

Meagan Hagerty has worked in higher education for over 15 years. Her experience spans across leadership and orientation programs, summer conference operations, academic advising, curriculum design, and serving as a leadership minor instructor at the University of Minnesota. She currently serves as the chair of the Emerging Leaders Program advisory board for NACADA - the global community for academic advising. She is an active member and volunteer for Delta Sigma Pi, where she serves as the president of the Twin Cities Alumni Chapter. She is an avid Twins fan, loves traveling, and lives with her partner in Burnsville, MN.

JASON BERGERON & CHRIS GRAHAM

In April 2021, Jason Bergeron, AFA executive director, and Chris Graham, AFA president, sat down together to review their first 100 days and to share their thoughts on the association, education, and fraternity/sorority life in general. The following is a recap of that conversation.

Jason Bergeron: Chris, what drew you into the fraternity/sorority advising profession and what drew you to want to pursue the AFA presidency?

Chris Graham: What drew me to the profession is my own experience. I was born in the North, then moved to North Carolina, and grew up there, as I shared in my inaugural address. I have nine siblings, so it was my experience of being a first-generation college student and finding a group of people I felt like I belonged with and could connect to. That is what certainly lead me to be called to this profession.

I don't think I was drawn to it; I think I was called to it — I view it as ministry, if you will. I was having an incredible experience on the board. I was watching, listening, and learning from Wendi, my predecessor, and the rest of my colleagues, and I thought, "You know what, you're really enjoying this. I think that I'm contributing greatly to this experience." And then, my own professional experience coupled with my identities, I thought it was the right time for me to accept the nomination and go through the NEC process to become the AFA president.

Jason, you spent years doing what I do now every day, working in the fraternity/sorority advising profession. You recently transitioned to a role on the AFA staff. What has kept you engaged so long in the profession?

JB: I entered the fraternity/sorority advising profession full time in 2006, and I spent 15 years there before I joined the AFA staff. What kept me in the work was in large part due to some of the communities that I built through involvement within AFA. It was about connecting with people who helped me to think differently about the work, who called me to the carpet when I was ignorant, who helped to educate me, and who helped to carry me along through the process.

Also, I was privileged to be surrounded by folks who were prepared to think about how we 'measure for success' in different ways. If there were things that no longer served us, then how could we change our approach — a recognition that there was no right way to do the work of fraternity/sorority advising — it was about meeting the outcomes that we were trying to meet. That flexibility and agility continued to keep me engaged in the profession, continued to keep me intellectually challenged, and continued to allow me to reposition things when we didn't necessarily feel like they were serving us in the best possible way.

From your perspective, as our president and our board chair, how is the board continuing to lead the association through COVID, and how do you anticipate we will emerge from the pandemic?

CG: I'll start by saying we are privileged as an association to have an incredible board, incredible professionals, and people that are incredibly dedicated and committed to fraternity/sorority life in their own respective ways. Being on the board of an association amid the COVID-19 pandemic and all other pandemics around racial injustice has been challenging but also a privilege.

I'll mention three things. First, we tried to be thoughtful and intentional about the needs of our members, the educational offerings and opportunities that we can provide to help them do this thing called fraternity/sorority advising, and the needs they have amid social justice issues that continue to bubble up and surface time and time again.

Second, we're a business and there are operations that come along with that, especially financial decisions. We've tried to think about our financial positioning, and to be quite candid as Anne Emmerth, our treasurer, has shared with the membership, "We've had to make some difficult decisions; however, because of great stewarding by current and previous Boards that we've done in previous years and certainly this past year, we're in a good financial position."

Third, I'm proud that this board is centralizing DEI efforts, and it's not just one special project. We are centering these efforts in ongoing conversations with the central office staff, how we better support, train, and equip our volunteers, how we identify who are our volunteers, and how we provide educational offerings. There's more to come, and there's currently a committee working on these things in terms of how to help AFA move forward as it relates to DEI.

I'll turn the question back to you, from your perspective as the executive director, what conversations are occurring in the AFA Central Office that will prepare the association to emerge from the pandemic on a path to being a stronger association?

JB: While the pandemic has been challenging to navigate emotionally, physically, and professionally, there are elements of access that were thrust into AFA's ecosystem. Our annual meeting is a perfect example. The team transitioned the delivery to a virtual format, which allowed us to increase access to the Annual Meeting and allowed us to dismantle a little bit of the annual meeting culture in ways that I think were helpful and beneficial to the association.

Post Annual Meeting, our conversations have shifted to our strategy moving forward. How do we marry affordability and access for future association programs and offerings? How are we thinking about the long-term hybridization of events, like our annual meetings, so that people who want an in-person or remote experience can do so? What are the ways distance learners can still feel involved and engaged? How are other associations recalibrating their major programs now that we have been pushed into this new delivery method?

Many of us have talked about the odd clarifying effects that the pandemic can have around who we are and where we sit in the world. The AFA Central Office is having some of those conversations around who we serve, who is our core audience, how do we want to serve that core audience, and how do we want to impact the fraternity/sorority advising profession and the fraternity/sorority industry more broadly.

In the next coming weeks and months, our members will start to hear about AFA engaging in some recalibrating efforts, and those larger questions are taking a lot of the teams' time as we talk about how we want to emerge from the pandemic in a stronger position.

Chris, transitioning to higher education as a whole. What trends in higher ed, and more narrowly in fraternity/sorority advising, do you see shifting our work and the work of our members?

CG: Trends are something I think a lot about, and the first is how challenging it is to make diversity, equity, and inclusion central to our work as a profession. I know it's DEI, but I like to call it DEIE with the second E for me being "empathy." If we focus on DEI, but hearts and minds are not changed, then I don't know if we really made the type of progress that we are really inspiring to make. Empathy is just as important as the diversity, the equity, and the inclusion.

My desire is that it's not just "is a trend coming and going" — because we're not just navigating the COVID-19 pandemic, we're navigating multiple pandemics at a time. There's an economic crisis going on in this country impacting what students and their families can afford by way of the fraternity/sorority experience. There's also a racial awakening with social justice front and center. A lot of that started with us, unfortunately, having to watch a Black man with a knee on his neck for what we thought was 8 minutes and 46 seconds, but now come to find out it was over 9 minutes. It might not be a literal knee on our neck, but far too many of us, including our members, have these experiences every day.

A second trend is around partnerships. This is something more narrowly focused on fraternity/sorority life, but the tensions and challenges around what we value and what's important is impacting partnerships between institutions and our national organizations. Most, if not all, institutions came out with guidelines, regulations, and expectations for student behavior, and from an organizational perspective, there have been challenges with that.

If we're going to be honest with ourselves, we started to see this trend of strong tensions between institutions and organizations prior to the pandemic. Tensions around what is best for student organizations and what the student experience on a particular campus should be. How do you navigate that when you have multiple organizations on your campus? What's the right balance when pain points might be different on different campuses and in between different organizations? While the tension is not new, how it's showing up and the consequences of it certainly is.

The final trend is around the economic crisis. If you think about college affordability and being able to afford college alone, much less a fraternity/sorority experience, coupled with the pandemic and the upcoming decline in individuals going to college, I think we're in for quite a challenge. Fraternities and sororities will need to think about our value proposition and what value we add to the lives of our members. I know it's personal for those of us in an organization, but students who have yet to have the experience, we are going to have to become clearer about the value that it can add to their life.

For you, what events in the past year have shaped the fraternity/sorority advising profession moving forward and in what ways?

JB: I would echo those events. There's been the double pandemic at play here, the COVID-19 pandemic and the pandemic around Black lives, both influencing how our profession is going to be shaped for the next generation of fraternity/sorority professionals.
For those of us who were not in remote situations previously, the transition to fully remote work was an abrupt one. Even the most well-oiled machines had significant challenges walking into this new space of fully remote work. I think about what mobile and remote work will look like as we start to emerge from this, and what elements of remote work will continue to exist that we've recognized are useful or helpful. This past year has taught us there's an opportunity for work to be increasingly mobile and agile.

Another focus is on the pandemic around racial justice and Black lives and thinking about the ways in which we decolonize the fraternity/sorority advising profession and the fraternity/sorority experience in general. How are we decentering White students and White experiences in the work? How are we, in turn, centering the work that needs to be done to support Black students and students of color? LGBTQ+ students? There is a decolonization around our work which excites me for the future.

Many of us have had the opportunity to reclaim some of our time at home. I'm interested to know what's the skill area, content area, or personal characteristic that you've taken time to nurture or reinvest in over the past 12 months.

CG: Last spring, since I had more time, I wasn't commuting to work, I wasn't in the office late at night etc., I didn't have an excuse to not focus on myself. I started working out 6 days a week, and I am down about 40 pounds which I'm proud of.

I used to make excuse after excuse after excuse about why I can't go to the gym or why I can't go for a walk around my neighborhood or whatever. In the past year, I've had no excuses, and I've taken advantage of it.

I've been able to focus on myself more, and I understand for some folks that's been difficult, lonely, and isolating. However, I've focused on how I can prevail from this double pandemic, how I can emerge healthier and more whole, and how I reconnect with family and friends.
What about you? What's one thing that you've taken the opportunity to improve upon during the pandemic?

JB: I've been lucky to be engaged in some level of physical fitness for most of my adult life. I would say the area that has always been challenging for me is diet and nutrition. I used to be able to "out exercise a bad diet," and as a 39-year-old, that has become the magic number at which my body has said, "That was part of your past, but it is not part of your future."

As I attempt to recapture and reclaim my diet, I think more critically about my own nutrition and about myself as a cook. Cooking was something I didn't see myself doing, but it has given me an opportunity to experiment, try new things, go through the trial-and-error process, and to think about it as an exercise to fuel and to nourish. There is something about reclaiming your whole meal making process from beginning to end, whereas before I just enjoyed the end part, which is the eating part. Now, I take ownership over my diet from beginning to end, and I can focus on that in a way that I wasn't able to do before.

Our final question has two parts. First, what's one piece of advice that you would give around navigating uncertainty? And second, what is something you want AFA members to know about you that they currently don't know?

CG: In times of uncertainty, I try to really focus on what I know to be true and what I am incredibly certain about. I focus on what I have instead of what I don't have or what I have lost. As someone who lost several family members during the pandemic and had other personal challenges, I held to what I know, what I have, and who are the people that help sustain me.

I am also blessed to have an incredible family. I shared earlier that I have nine siblings, and some days I like them better than others but nonetheless I have nine, and I have an incredible mom. I have incredible friends, fraternity brothers, colleagues, and incredible people that I am surrounded by that help sustain me, keep me grounded, lift me up when I might need it, and that encourage me to be a little more humble when I need that too.

Something that the AFA members might not know about me is that I'm originally from New York City. So, I know I don't sound like it, unless I get really upset, then you can hear it. Also, I still walk fast, so if you ever see me somewhere or I'm ever around you'll probably say, "Yeah Chris walks fast." The other thing that I'll share is that I was adopted. To be quite honest, that was something I just wasn't forthcoming about, and I did not share growing up that I was adopted. To me, that was not something to be proud of, and it impacted my view and disposition around what it means to belong, to find family, and to be around people that love you for who you are.

Same questions. What's one piece of advice you would give to our members? What is something AFA members might not know?

JB: For those who follow a strengths mindset, analytical is my number one strength. When I am confronted with a situation, I sort for truth first. Doing this first allows me to evaluate things and make sense of them in the world. In navigating uncertainty, this has been helpful to eliminate distractions and to focus on the voices that matter and the voices that have historically been unheard.

I've also learned to take that distraction-free element into my life moving forward. I've focused on listening to the voices that are contributing to my understanding of the world around me, so I can help the truth to emerge. It has been my experience that when you provide distraction-free zones, those historically unheard voices get elevated. For instance, the pandemic around Black lives that has existed for hundreds of years; this past year, it took new shape because there have been no other distractions and it has pulled us into a place to force us to have a reckoning.

What I would want AFA members to know is that I grew up as a Mid-Westerner, but I was born in Virginia and have deep family roots there, so when we relocated to Ohio when I was five, I brought with me a deep Southern accent. This Southern draw exists only in videos that will remain in a vault until I decide that they are appropriate enough for the world to see them … which may be never and that's great.

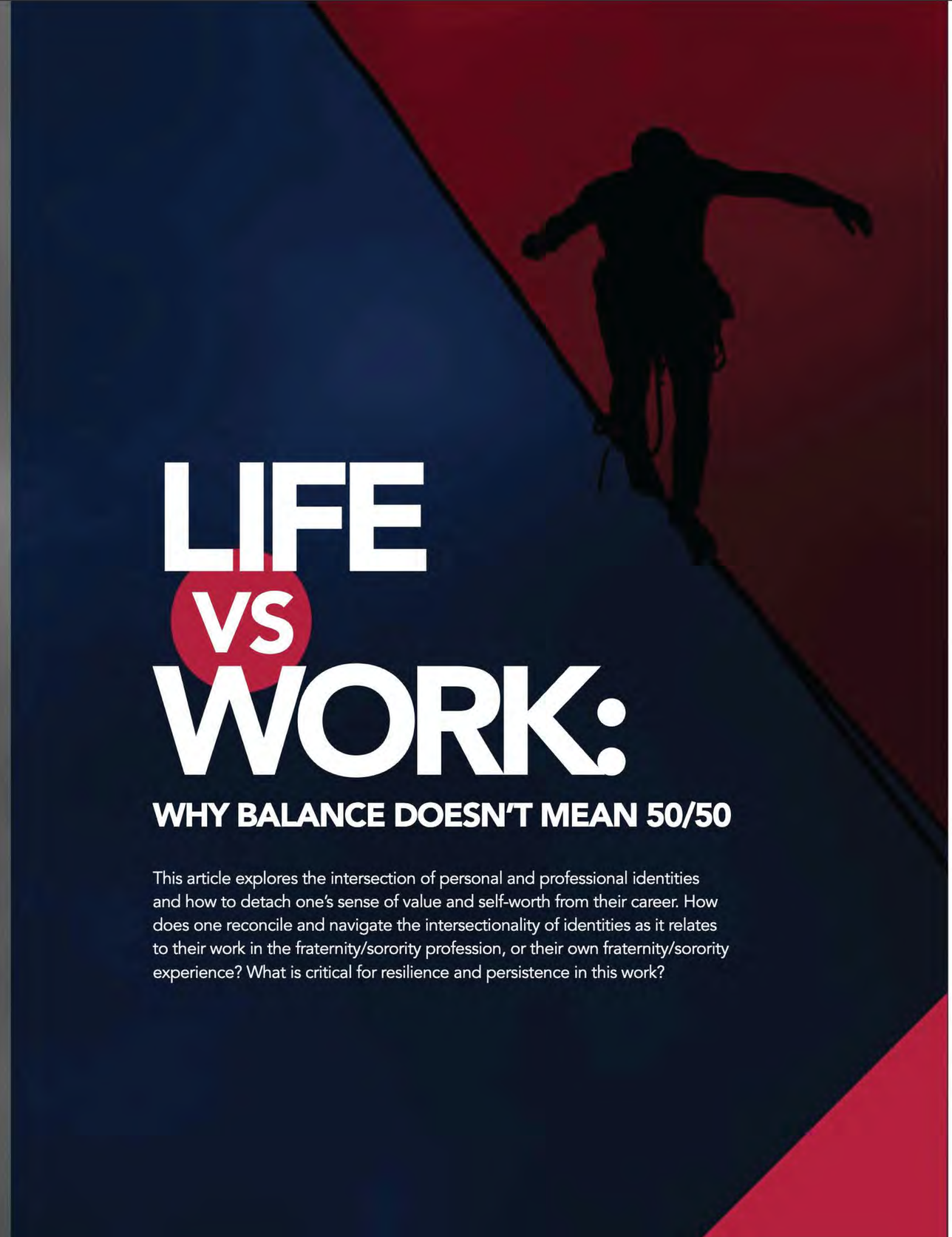
To view the full one-on-one conversation visit the AFA Vimeo page.

Jason Bergeron
Association of Fraternity/Sorority Advisors
Executive Director

Jason Bergeron joined the staff at the AFA Central Office in January 2021 as AFA's executive director. Prior to that, Jason served as a campus-based fraternity/sorority advising professional for 15 years. Jason is a proud member of Pi Lambda Phi Fraternity.

Chris Graham
Association of Fraternity/Sorority Advisors
President

Chris Graham currently serves as director of fraternity and sorority life at Florida State University. In addition to that role, he serves our profession as president of the Association of Fraternity/Sorority Advisors. He is a proud member of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc.



WHY BALANCE DOESN'T MEAN 50/50

This article explores the intersection of personal and professional identities and how to detach one's sense of value and self-worth from their career. How does one reconcile and navigate the intersectionality of identities as it relates to their work in the fraternity/sorority profession, or their own fraternity/sorority experience? What is critical for resilience and persistence in this work?

HANNAH COTTON

THE BUILDUP

As a second semester freshman who had just discovered student affairs, I was on a mission. My color-coded planner was a proud display of my days full of classes and homework. This meant I could fill my afternoons and evenings with countless meetings for organizations I was part of — each also color-coded, of course. What was not noted in my planner was that I frequently left the student union after lunch with my second iced coffee of the day to help me power through it all.

In graduate school, I worked long weeks on coursework and in my assistantship, and then I spent my evenings and weekends hanging out with my co-workers and co-grads. When you live in a college town, the people you work with can quickly become your family. Today, these people remain some of my closest friends, which makes volunteering and going to conferences more than just professional development. My professional life was my personal life. The line between them was blurred to the point where my work became a major part of my identity.

Even though my name was now on my very own door in the Office of Fraternity and Sorority Life, in many ways I was still that driven, color-coded planner toting, make it happen freshman with iced coffee in her veins. This work is a part of who I am, and I am going to succeed.

I took failing hard. It was difficult to accept feedback because I saw it as the outcome of personal failure. The perfectionist in me did not want to learn from setbacks, she wanted to get it right the first time and "wow" everyone with her expertise. At the time, I did not realize this struggle was a result of placing so much of my self-worth in the success of my career. Had I been more focused on placing value on other aspects of my life, I would have been better equipped to take feedback and use it to improve.

When it feels like everyone else in the fraternity/sorority advising community lives and breathes their work, it can feel like you should as well. Though, at this point in my career, I wanted this life and eagerly pursued the path I perceived to be modeled by successful professionals around me. If they could spend their weeknights teaching a class or facilitating an educational program, then so could I. I could do it anytime someone needed me.

Part of what facilitated this environment in my life was I had been unattached to another person or geographical area for most of my professional career. It was easy to spend my weekends traveling for ASTP, attending conferences, and taking on more volunteer roles because it filled my time and built up my experience as a young professional. I was happy to revolve my personal life around my professional life. I was building experience and working toward professional advancement. If most of my identity and success in life came from my job as a result, well that seemed reasonable to me.

When COVID-19 hit, I found myself shifting priorities, as many likely did. I had to be more intentional about setting work boundaries when I could no longer leave my office to go home. I had a workstation in the dining room, and when I left that space at 5 p.m., I was done with work for the day — usually. I recently listened to an episode of the 1A Podcast called "The Promises and Pitfalls of Pandemic Productivity" which suggested this type of structure can help employees feel more "normal" because it is the closest you can get to a physical separation of work from the rest of your life.

I also started to reimagine the benefit of always being productive and "on." I wondered why this seemed so ingrained in me and in so many of my friends and colleagues. As noted in the 1A Podcast, the values of capitalism dictate time equals money. Therefore, we have subconsciously learned to believe people who work harder are more deserving. So, it is no wonder many of us feel the pressure to produce – I know I do.

I had a realization when Celeste Headlee, a guest on the podcast, said those few extra hours of work at night never made the following mornings any easier. I was doing the same thing with no evidence it was working in my own life either.

In the last year, we have all been looking for ways to navigate our new reality. I have read, and reposted, my fair share of quotes and articles about productivity on social media in this endeavor. They really helped me reflect on why I thought it was so important to constantly produce results for the sake of productivity. Reading other people's thoughts on their lack of productivity during the pandemic made me feel better on the days when work just did not feel like a priority. As I contrasted these feelings with my pre-pandemic views of productivity, I was able to reconcile a realignment of priorities. This allowed me to find comfort with not judging myself, or others, based on perceptions of productivity or output.

Every Monday morning, I look forward to reading RISE Partnerships' weekly email, "The Horizon." One week in September, they included an article called "The dangers of 'workism'" and, wow, did I need it. The article, by Josh Levs and originally published in the magazine Strategy+business, reminded me that by connecting my identity so heavily to my work, I actually could become a less effective employee — someone

who takes project failures personally and cannot not see the bigger picture. This spoke to my type A and Enneagram 1 personality and simultaneously felt like a gut punch. It was clear I had fallen back into the trap of "workism" and needed to process the stress and bad habits I had redeveloped while "living at work" during the pandemic so far.

A clear example of this struggle resurfaced as the buildup to fall semester began — feeling the need to work until 7:00 or 8:00 p.m. multiple nights a week. Sitting on hours of Zoom meetings with IFC, while my partner made us dinner down the hall, became a regular occurrence. And talk about being less effective. As I stared at the conference program proposal submissions, I drew a blank. My foggy brain worried my resume would look blank for 2020/2021, like I was missing in action from the field. It was talking to my friends in the field, and hearing them verbalize exactly how I was feeling, when I started to accept that 2020 was going to be an off year for many of us.

BETWEEN JOBS

Then, what felt like all at once, I was no longer employed. I was in a new city with no friends, in a pandemic, nonetheless. I plopped down on the couch and turned on Netflix to distract myself from my lack of job-related emails. I was on a mission to finish my seven-season series and now I finally had all the time to do it. I breathed a deep sigh of relief (and concern), as I began to unwind from all the mental stress of the previous eight months. Escaping the feeling of being overworked, I took long walks through my new city. I found the best coffee shops and the prettiest streets. I also had time to focus on my volunteer roles. I crafted virtual programs for my sorority, I facilitated virtual ASTP, and I even joined a new committee. It was kind of nice to have this time to relax and decompress after a stressful few months. This built-in break from taking on my job's stressors as my own personal problems might have been just what I needed. Moving across the country without a job lined up was scary and not something I would recommend, if you have the choice. However, relocating with my partner for his job was important to me.

There is no way to describe job searching during a pandemic other than demoralizing. Amidst hiring freezes and furloughs, there was no end in sight. Day after day, I spent time researching jobs, editing cover letters, and practicing for interviews.

With each interview, I knew the applicant pool was hyper competitive. Doubt would creep into the back of my head as I wondered if I really belonged among them. I questioned if I should start searching outside of fraternity/sorority life, or even outside of higher education. This was tough to reckon with, as someone who had shaped the past ten years of their life around building a career in this profession.

As I figured out how to fill my time and work through the many feelings I was experiencing, I kept going back to a salient point from Levs' article — staying engaged in meaningful activities outside of work is important. He even references a whole article about this from the Harvard Business Review. In that article, the author, Gaetano DiNardi, talks about how playing guitar helps him get creative, look at things from different perspectives, and feel more confident. Reading about the positive relationship between creative hobbies and performance-based outcomes made me want to be more deliberate about scheduling in time to read, bake, and to find other hobbies that would help me be a better employee and help me relax.

My personal growth throughout this experience ultimately fueled the perseverance that would lead to my next professional endeavor. What I learned was not necessarily how to detach one's sense of value and self-worth from one's career. Rather, I discovered my resilience and dedication to the field. I continued to feel the connection to and significance of what we do in fraternity/sorority life, which helped me push on with the job search. I learned to be flexible by assessing my range as a professional, and as a person. This journey was about figuring out what is important to me. I worked hard to focus on doing things because they were part of my own personal and professional priorities, not because I let the pressure of how busy everyone else seems get to me. Like Levs, I was able to make sure I still "knew who I was outside of work." Then, I checked my inbox – finding no new emails had appeared in the last six minutes.

STARTING WORK AGAIN

When I accepted a new job, and saw my empty days whittling down quickly, I had to decide if I should attend this week's "Tuesday Talks" and read this month's Essentials articles or sit and binge watch the final season of "The West Wing." As I reread DiNardi's article, I realized I needed to make time for both. I enjoy my work, and I want to keep learning, growing, and advancing in the field. However, on days where I just need to sit and stare at the TV screen, I grant myself that space too.

TAKEAWAYS

Work-life balance is a cliché, and I still do not know if I buy it. I often think back to my graduate school professor who would harp on "work life harmony." As Andreas Jones points out, this idea focuses on integrating your work and personal lives, rather than the two competing for your time and effort. It seems more realistic to know sometimes you will focus more on work life and other times you will focus more on personal life, without having to force it all to balance out at the same time. It also means everyone will find their own unique harmony. This seems more natural that we might find a harmony that may ebb and flow as we change jobs and go through different stages of life.

What I learned was not necessarily how to detach one's sense of value and self-worth from one's career. Rather, I discovered my resilience and dedication to the field.

Today my work/life harmony involves working hard during the day on things I really care about and believe in, remembering to get up from my desk with every hourly Apple watch reminder, and taking a walk every day during lunchtime. It also involves relaxing at the end of the day by making dinner and watching TV with my partner. Some evenings, I might have committee meetings to log into, which is fine with me because I enjoy my volunteer roles.

The most important thing we can do to reconcile and navigate the intersection of our identities is to set intentional priorities. This means reflecting on what you want out of life and how much you are willing to put into it, and then being okay with what you want to change as you grow and evolve. There is a reason some people have been in the same middle-manager job for 20 years and others change jobs every few years, bouncing from place to place. There is no specific destination we can strive for and no all-knowing level we can attain where we will finally be able to detach our sense of value and self-worth from our careers. If you choose to work, it probably fits somewhere into your identity, but you have to do some soul searching to find yourself and decide how big a piece you can willingly allot to work. It does not have to be your whole life, but hopefully it is something you care about and find value in working hard at.

Figuring out what I want out of life is continually unfolding, especially in this stage where I am moving through many big life events. I have realized if I truly want to be the best at my work, which, let's face it, I still do, I have to intentionally carve out time for the other things I enjoy in life (my partner, baking, Netflix), so I can be a better employee when I am "on." By scheduling in important aspects of my personal life, I am working to ensure continued fulfillment in a wide variety of areas. My advice to anyone trying to do the same is to prioritize the things that will bring you joy and relaxation outside of work and will help you be a better human.

Does this mean my work is not still a huge part of my identity? No. Have I learned that there are many more important aspects of my identity that make up who I am? Absolutely. I think it is important to take the judgment out of this journey and to focus on your unique path. So often, we find ourselves following along with what everyone around us is doing or feeling like we are wrong if we choose to go in a different direction. The peer pressure of who got the latest promotion or who has the happiest family is not helpful for anyone who is trying to navigate their identity within or outside of the fraternity/sorority profession. The point is to bridge the gap between working so hard you burn out and feeling like you should not have to work hard at all.

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As I shutdown my computer at my work-from-home desk after a long week, I think back to myself in the same place just a few months ago. That person was pacing up and down the hallway between Zoom meetings just to relieve some tension. She was eating lunch at 3 p.m. many days and worrying through the weekend about how she would get everything done the following week. Today, I finished out my week on a Zoom happy hour with my coworkers. I willingly chose to extend my week in order to socialize with my new colleagues and there could not have been a better way to end the week.

Hannah Cotton
Sigma Alpha Epsilon Fraternity
Manager of Education

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BUILDING A COALITION IN TIMES OF UNCERTAINTY

ALEX ZERNECHEL

There has never been a more critical time for community or strong partnerships than where we currently find ourselves. As professionals, we constantly stress the importance of community and relationship-building to the student leaders with whom we work; however, as a profession, we are left trying to encourage our student leaders to maintain chapter operations virtually, with little to no idea how to do so ourselves.

COVID-19 upended our sense of normalcy, and as our institutions began to send students home, I struggled to adjust to this change. I found myself at a loss to encourage student leaders on our campus to continue normal operations, while also attempting to move forward and prepare for what the fall semester may bring. How do I advise chapters to conduct their initiation ceremonies or chapter elections? How do we honor community and individual accomplishments at the end of the year? What do we do about housing for the fall? These were only a few of the endless stream of questions I had, and I wasn't finding the answers within my own institution. Throughout the summer months, a racial awakening compounded the situation, and as I settled into my own "new normal" (working at a home office in a closet), I realized I had no idea on how to move forward.

My initial desire was to create a sense of community for my own benefit, but as I attempted to navigate how to support our fraternity/sorority community at the University of Toledo in preparing for the upcoming semester, I became aware of how much my colleagues across Ohio seemed to need a professional community just as much as I did. I started conversations with the hope that someone could help guide me on how to do my job in this new environment and how I could continue to support the students I worked with when their world had been flipped upside down. What I found were peers who were just as confused as I was, who had their own questions and concerns, and who had little guidance from our respective institutions.

In March of 2020, I reached out to the fraternity/sorority advising professionals at our flagship institution, The Ohio State University. In a discussion with Dr. Kim Monteaux DeFreitas, director of sorority and fraternity life, the notion of a state-wide FSA coalition was born. Our goal was to virtually gather the fraternity/sorority professionals from across the state. The initial idea was prompted from attending a session by fraternity/sorority professionals in Kentucky who shared their statewide advisor training model at AFA's Annual Meeting. For Kim, the idea of bringing together our state professionals for community learning and support was like the annual gatherings hosted by the Big Ten's professional staff. As a younger professional learning how to manage a community while also navigating supervision responsibilities for the first time, I leaned into this experience. In many ways, I developed a professional mentorship with Kim, and she pushed me to lead this initiative.

Creating Community through Coalition

The notion of community development and coalition building is not new; in fact, it is heavily utilized within the field of public health. Originally developed by the Contra Costa County (California) Health Services Department Prevention Program, we utilized Developing Effective Coalitions: An Eight Step Guide. This guide, authored by Larry Cohen, Nancy Baer, and Pam Satterwhite, provides a means of generating effective community coalitions around injury prevention; however, we used this resource to develop a coalition of fraternity/sorority professionals. The guide defines a coalition as a union of people and organizations working to influence outcomes on a specific program, and the authors outline eight steps to develop a successful coalition. There are many benefits of coalition building ranging from education, sharing resources and services, and advocacy for major changes.

Our group brought together professionals from 25 institutions across the state of Ohio with varying levels of staffing, resources, and expertise. We began meeting weekly at the end of March through the month of June, and again throughout August. We would meet over the lunch hour discussing topics ranging from housing and recruitment/intake, to COVID-19 event restrictions, to communicating effectively with our communities. As we continued meeting, more professionals started attending; be it at the request of a supervisor, to gain a professional network, or to simply engage in the conversation for the day. Initial meetings were structured in a way that attendees were broken up into breakout rooms often based on the type of institution where they worked. However, early feedback from counterparts at private institutions helped us realize that while the breakout rooms were helpful, they best benefitted from engaging in one larger conversation.

Coalition calls provided space for professionals to continue building their presentation skills, while sharing about areas of the fraternity/sorority experience in which they were most passionate or well-versed. For example, John Keith, director of fraternity and sorority life at the University of Cincinnati, challenged our thinking when it came to how we supported NPHC/MGC members and organizations on our individual

Developing Effective Coalitions: An Eight Step Guide

Retrieved from https://www.preventioninstitute.org/sites/default/files/uploads/8steps_040511_WEB.pdf

Step 1: Analyze the program's objectives and determine whether to form a coalition.

The first step is to simply form the coalition. It could be facilitated because of a need within a community, requests from leadership within the community for assistance, or because the organization itself benefits from the formation of a coalition.

Step 2: Recruit the right people.

Focus on determining who is part of the team and involved in coalition discussions. Whose expertise would the coalition benefit from? Who would benefit from coalition participation?

Step 3: Devise a set of preliminary activities

Identify clear objectives and activities to carry out those objectives to engage coalition membership.

Step 4: Convene the coalition

Bring everyone together once details are determined.

Step 5: Anticipate the necessary resources

Think through financial, human, physical, and technological needs.

Step 6: Define elements of a successful coalition structure

What structural components allow for coalition's longevity, productivity, and ability to meet its initial objectives? How do we know, and what is the membership telling the planning team?

Step 7: Maintain coalition vitality

How often should the coalition meet? Is this an on-going opportunity or time-restricted entity?

Step 8: Make improvements through evaluation

Regularly gather feedback from membership to adapt and address current issues related to the work of the coalition; adjust other elements based on such appraisals.

campuses, and he highlighted the barriers potentially created by a one size fits all approach to policies and procedures. Dennis Campbell, of Kent State University, helped the group process through ways to support our respective IFC communities through a fall recruitment process that was anything but normal.

"The work we do matters. We have the awesome responsibility of collectively shepherding one of the most visible functional areas in student life. Sometimes, you can get bogged down and feel like you and your staff are in it alone. This community reminds us that we aren't and that we have people just a phone call or email away that can give us that boost, pep talk, or policy review we need to keep going. We've been able to build community with one another in a way that didn't exist before. People that were just faces we saw once a year at conferences are now valued colleagues, and I can't wait to see where we head next together."

John Keith
University of Cincinnati

Our group's meetings became a place where we were able to express our frustrations, fears, and uncertainty without fear of criticism. Similar to our peers in other operational areas, we had to pivot and adapt to virtual settings; however, many of us found ourselves with the added expectation of policing member behavior due to perceived, amplified risk management concerns. When many of us found ourselves shut out of critical conversations on our own campuses that directly impacted our communities, this group engaged in conversations that enabled many to communicate what our peers were doing across the state to address concerns to our supervisors. Some shared plans and many found they were able to piece together answers and guidance on how to move forward with strong ideas or full plans to engage their necessary stakeholders. Carrie Anderson, from Youngstown State University, shared that she benefited from this professionals' coalition because of everyone's willingness to share vital resources and engage in open, honest, and candid conversation. "This space helped me know and feel I was on the right track in handling situations on my campus," she shared. "It also boosted my confidence and ability to add insight to discussions on our campus because of our conversations."

This comradery between schools provided numerous benefits, but one of the greatest was (and is) the opportunity for collaboration. Since starting this working group, I've personally worked with my counterparts at Bowling Green State University to create a combined officer training workshop that allowed for all our council officers to come together to learn, build support, and benefit from the shared expertise on both campuses. Miami University hosted an NPHC Drive-In to provide leadership development specifically designed and dedicated to NPHC groups and campuses within the state, and they have offered to work with any campus interested in hosting that program in the future.

Addressing More than the Pandemic

We are constantly reminded that the fraternity/sorority advising profession touches almost every aspect of a university campus; however, we are also the functional area with some of the youngest professionals in higher education, often with a lack of resources needed to accomplish everything expected of us. This is a lot for anyone to juggle, regardless if you've been in the field for one year or ten years. This organic community we have grown came to serve as a professional and personal support group for many of us. As if a pandemic wasn't enough, in the wake of the murder of George Floyd and other racial injustices, we and our members across the country continue to wrestle with values congruence between themselves and their respective organizations. Many institutions began experiencing financial crises and responded with layoffs, furloughs, budget reductions, and the elimination of professional development funds. Not knowing when the financial situation would get better and when individuals would be able to return to work full time impacted us as professionals, and like much of the country, our families and our well-being. Through our newly established community, we found an unofficial support group and were able to navigate the lack of job security during the spring and summer months together. Gina Keucher, of Wright State University, shared, "There were furloughs, talks of budget cuts, and a very real concern that at any time our campus would decide to cut those of us in student affairs. I found the comradery of meeting with others with the same concerns to be just what I needed to stay motivated and focused."

While this is not the way I would have initially imagined a community to come together, the community we have established across the state of Ohio has become enormously beneficial and offers so much potential as we continue forward. Across the country, we hear about continuing decreases in available resources, and our coalition is one way to be creative. Other opportunities for us to come together include collective programming and training amongst institutions and the chance to broaden our coalition to our student communities and volunteer advisors as well.

The best thing about the community we created was there was no sense of territory — no one held back in sharing with the group great ideas and their best practices. I found myself thinking "I should have been doing that — what a great idea." Sometimes fraternity/sorority life has young professionals that are still finding their way, and our group gave them people they can now reach out to as an informal mentor.

Gina Keucher
Wright State University

I truly had no idea what I was doing when I first reached out seeking advice, and I never imagined others would find value in these conversations or that they would continue months after the initial idea. The opportunity to learn within our profession does not always require attending a conference or a webinar — it can come from a simple conversation between friends and colleagues. As I have reflected on the past several months, I know that I would not have been able to get through it without my colleagues across the great state of Ohio. I have truly benefited from the wisdom and expertise of these individuals. I would encourage you to consider building community with your neighboring institutions or within your state to see what could be accomplished. Coming together in shared experiences as we work to advance the fraternity/sorority experience is truly rewarding.

Alex Zernechel
University of Toledo
Interim Associate Director for Student Involvement and Fraternity & Sorority Life

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KEVIN J. BAZNER, PH.D.

It's true being a manager is hard; however, being a middle manager might be harder if for no other reason than we do not often discuss the experiences of middle managers in student affairs. Despite being the largest classification of any staff member, the role and experiences of middle managers are largely ignored. A reason for this is middle managers, across multiple industries, often shoulder the brunt of implementing strategy and policy, yet they have little power attached to the position … aka "not enough sway to make it go my way." This has caused researchers and professional associations to ignore the potential of middle managers. Another reason is flat out confusion about who exactly is a middle manager.

The experiences of being in the "middle" often signals transition or passage onto something different, bigger, or new. Middle managers in higher education have largely been typecast as a position one holds on the way to senior leadership, a temporary placement on the way to something bigger; "I will hold this position for a few years until I find a dean of students or vice president position." However, that is the exception to the norm. Middle managers in student affairs comprise the largest administrative grouping and typically have the longest tenure out of their colleagues, yet professional development opportunities are either non-existent or relegated to a special "institute" or add-on workshop. Overall, I argue middle managers need greater attention in higher education research and within association professional development. Particular attention must also be directed to understanding experiences of minoritized middle managers who challenge dominant norms of leadership simply by occupying their roles but continue to face marginalization. First, let's talk about why being a "middle" anything is hard.

What Would You Say You Do Here?

One of my favorite scenes from the movie "Office Space" (which I'm realizing dates me a little) is when Tom, a front-line manager, is being interviewed by two efficiency consultants, "the Bobs." One of the Bobs asks Tom, "What would you say ya' do here?" Tom then irritatingly responds, "I have people skills! I am good at dealing with people! Can't you understand that? What the hell is wrong with you people?" Tom's response resonates with one of the most frustrating aspects of being a mid-level manager: articulating the specific role, responsibilities, and value-add to the organizations in which they work. Tom's longer response also illuminates the vast constituent groups he interacts with on a daily basis — everyone from customers, to engineers, other managers, and supervisors. Researcher and practitioner definitions of who is a middle manager widely differ and can depend on program oversight, supervisory roles, or control of resources. Scholars and practitioners have recognized middle management for their important role as a conduit or translator between the decision makers (executive leadership) and the implementers (front-line staff) but still rest on segmented job roles and responsibilities laden with contention, ambiguity, and anxiety.

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When we do talk about middle managers it is in segmented terms. Are they a supervisor? Do they report to someone higher up? Are they responsible for a functional area? Do they carry out the adopted strategic plan from the vice president? Do they have power to influence students, staff, and policy? Are they restrained with the power and resources granted by their senior administrators? A simple answer to these questions is, "Yes, all of these things are true." Such compartmentalized questions might seem to make it helpful to understand the variant roles a middle manager holds; however, this segmented thinking or believing middle management is simply a transition reinforces a dangerous fallacy that has plagued our field. This fallacy also leads to exorbitant burnout and obscures the dynamics of middle managers within student affairs.

We need to start viewing the role of middle managers through an intersectional lens and with a both/and approach that positions middle managers to serve critical roles that meet the mission of higher education institutions rather than an either/or binary. Middle managers are not simply supervisors or glorified budget keepers, so they require greater attention in graduate school and ongoing professional development. For example, administrative leadership conversations often view leadership or followership in isolation and neglect the nuance of intersectional experiences of power from those having to do both. This lack of attention only reinforces notions of role ambiguity and role conflict that is inherently present as a middle manager and tends to lend itself to a lot of frustration and burnout. Instead, we need to have larger conversations about how middle managers serve the greater good of the institution and develop skills to build coalitions across institutional hierarchies. Success as a middle manager often depends on how well the person understands institutional culture and their ability to navigate politics, but it also informs who may be tapped for senior student affairs positions. Decades of research, including my own, point to an ongoing problem that we are not having enough conversations about navigating institutional politics. Instead, I have witnessed too many middle managers regress to what they know or were trained to do in graduate school — advise students instead of devoting more time to supervision and developing their political and managerial skills. Mind you, becoming politically-savvy will not address the dominant norms that must be addressed in student affairs practice and the continued underrepresentation of minoritized administrators in senior leadership.

Middle Management is Not Always a Steppingstone

The socialized expectations we place on student affairs graduate students is ridiculous, and they carry through in our younger professionals and are reinforced by our seasoned ones. I'm talking about the choosing a "good" graduate program, finding your entry level position for 3-4 years, moving up to middle manager, all while volunteering for leadership conferences, attending the annual conference, and racking up the points (or ribbons) for recognition … ahem, I'm looking at you #AFAFamous! Afterwards, you might start looking at doctoral programs or an available AVP, dean of students, or other senior-administrative position. If you don't find one, you might think you have failed and become demotivated, or you decide to leave the field altogether. Longevity in middle management should be celebrated for those modeling great behavior and rewarded appropriately. I can think of a number of colleagues in fraternity/sorority advising who have built dynasties from their longevity in mid-level positions. Judging our worth by how well we adhere to that script must stop! There is not a predefined road map, blueprint, or plan … if you have someone telling you there is, find a new mentor. This same thing can be said about management style. There is not a singular "best-practice" for how to be a great middle manager.

Who Gets To Be Great?

It is likely not going to be a surprise to many minoritized groups (racial, gender, sexuality, etc.) that higher education's embodiment of excellence is a straight, white man. I see this in the number of named professional association awards for "excellence" and "leadership." I also see this in the types of behaviors that get rewarded or recognized in student affairs. Not everyone is going to approach supervision, communication, and leadership the "white" way such that people of color are often expected to conform to white universal standard of professionalism.

For example, Black women middle managers should not have to navigate the emotional reactions of their white supervisees or have their senior administrator accuse them of being the "angry Black lady" when calling out racist policies and practices. Let's stop accepting a white standard of "normal" and stop assuming our racially minoritized colleagues are acting unprofessionally forcing them to perform a certain way to be accepted by their white colleagues. The same can be said for middle managers who might not have the political-savviness to vertically code-switch across institutional hierarchy or the social capital to have developed the ability to code-switch cross-culturally.

Code switching, regardless of the type, does nothing more than reinforce dominant norms within a space that are deemed correct and are rewarded. That is why we too often have a woman in a space say something that gets ignored by senior administrators followed up by the exact same thing flowing out of a man's mouth that gets applauded. Or, when a woman of color takes charge or offers a critique only to be accused of being angry or hard to work with, but we then give an award to a man for being a visionary leader. We must have larger conversations about how to be a better supervisor and how to be a better supervisee. Whiteness is a thing, racism and sexism exist, and there is no such thing as being neutral. It also means we need to expand how we approach mentorship in the field for those in middle management.

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Envisioning Our Future

Middle managers typically see the largest amount of frustration, burnout, and attrition in our field. If we intend to address the imbalance of representation in senior leadership positions, we must invest in our emerging and middle leaders. Having access to individuals to have honest dialogue and support when navigating middle management is crucial. However, student affairs and fraternity/sorority life is a small world and having access to individuals who do not hold institutional power or share conversations with individuals resulting in professional ramifications is more critical. Participants in my own research pointed to a number of times when they hesitated to share information with a mentor within their institutions out of fear of potential consequences. I think this requires more professional associations to take the lead in developing formalized mentor networks that provide greater access to advocates and sponsors across higher education. Oh, and compensate those mentors for their labor!

The only other thing I will add is middle managers, senior administrators, and local community leaders have to pay closer attention to what I call "quality of life" issues. While these issues can apply to every staff member, middle managers are often serving in their roles for longer tenures than frontline or senior administrators which means they are living in the communities longer. It is not fair to the new, queer middle manager in College Town, USA to drive two hours to find a social outlet, force our Black colleagues to hike it to the big city to find quality hair care, or require our Asian, Latinx, or immigrant professionals to stock up on food or get their "cultural fix" in larger metropolitan cities. In short, our professional development for middle managers must also extend to the community leaders who can address these shortcomings in some of our smaller college communities.

The Overlooked Potential of Middle Managers

Senior administrators may get all the leadership glory, but it really is middle managers who are the ones busy translating institutional strategic plans into action. Middle managers are the ones with larger interactions with frontline staff and student leaders, but they are also often neglected from being empowered to make decisions that potentially have greater impact or are undermined by senior administrators. Over time, the greatest expansion of administrative leadership in higher education has been with middle management. If student affairs leaders want to realize the missions of our institutions, we need to get serious about recognizing the connections between middle management administrative work and supportive campus communities.

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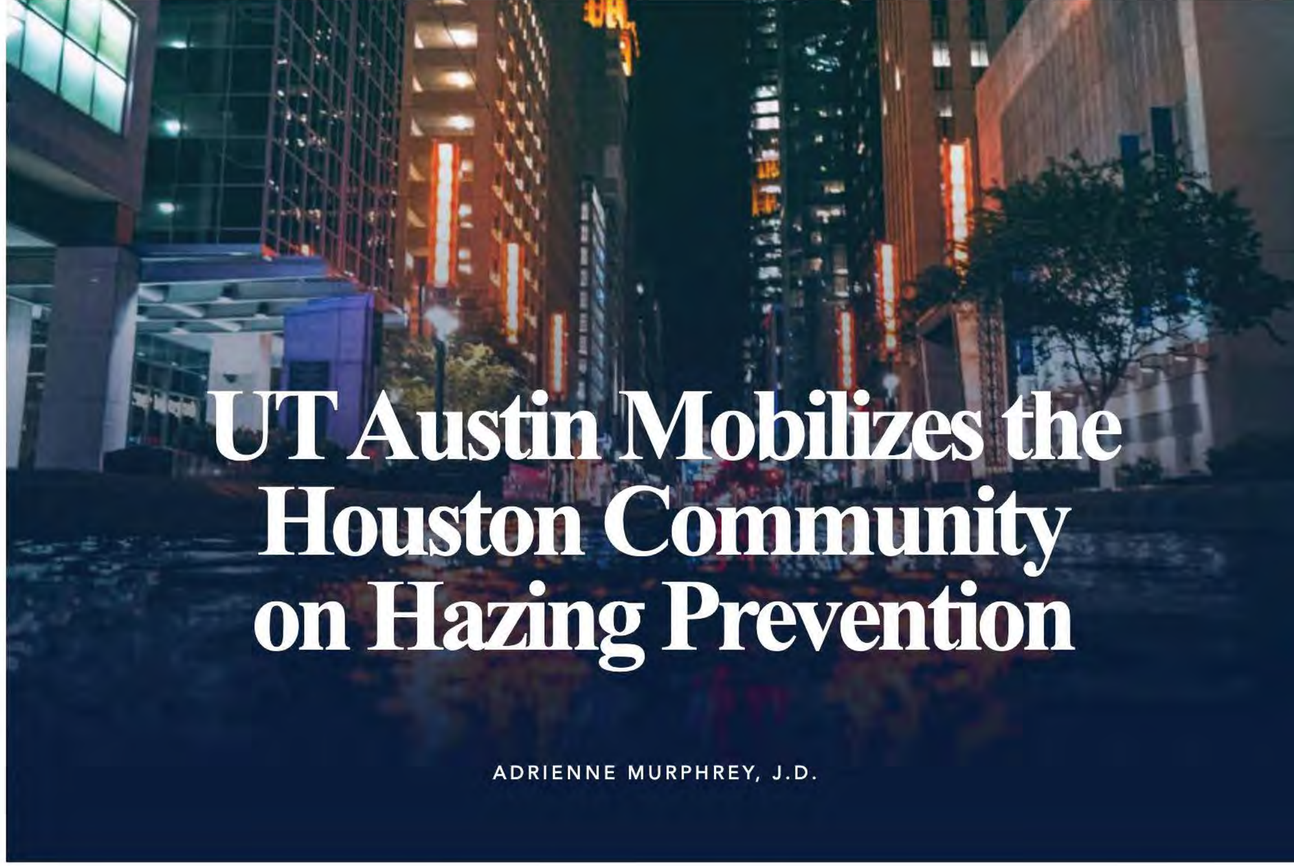

UT Austin Mobilizes the Houston Community on Hazing Prevention

ADRIENNE MURPHREY, J.D.

The potential new members enter the fraternity house. Fear and uncertainty wafts through the door as they gather to attend the required "meeting." The first thing they see is the new member trainer's wooden paddle, a commanding sign of what's to come. It sits on a tripod in front of the 25 bottles of liquor that encircles the foyer. The new members are asked to step inside the circle of bottles. The evening marches on with binge drinking, paddle beatings, and standing in the cold for hours in wet underwear. Do these individuals have a choice? They feel conflicted, but they remain silent.

These questions linger in their minds, "Is this really the only way to build the bonds of brotherhood? Is this the trade-off for belonging to a fraternity?"

The answer is an unequivocal no; however, why don't new members feel empowered to give that answer?

For decades, universities across the nation have contended with hazing on their campuses. By 2017, a cohort of parents, whose sons died of fraternity hazing, garnered attention with their national efforts to end hazing. Lawsuits were filed. Colleges changed their policies. States revisited weak or non-existent anti-hazing laws to hold individuals and organizations accountable for hazing behavior, including outlawing coerced consumption of alcohol and imposing stringent reporting requirements on universities.

While hazing is not new, the conversation about how to address hazing has evolved. According to the 2018 Hazing Prevention Consortium Survey, the shifting attitude against hazing and other high-risk behaviors started with college students themselves. Prior to this in 2017, as new anti-hazing conversations and ideas gained momentum across the country, a collaboration was underway between Dr. Soncia Reagins-Lilly, vice president for student affairs and dean of students at the University of Texas at Austin, and Robert Fondren, university donor, of the Fondren Foundation in Houston, Texas.

Dr. Lilly envisioned programs to educate communities about hazing and hazing prevention, and Fondren imagined a program that supported students with a local community approach. Together, they created the Houston Outreach Program to educate high school students, parents, administrators, alumni, and community leaders. "We wanted to help develop a program with UT Austin to educate the parents and their students in our community and to provide awareness to local leaders to create a support system for our students," says Fondren. "As the program developed, and we learned more from the research, we recognized this wasn't just about hazing. It was about giving students a voice and the tools to demand change. The Fondren Foundation's interest was not only to affect change in Houston but to help create a model for other communities to provide awareness and

local support for students attending the University of Texas which hopefully will benefit students attending other universities as well."

With the vision, the research, and the financial backing, the program quickly came together. Houston was selected as the first home for the program, due to the city's history of producing the highest number of sorority/fraternity members at UT Austin each year. The Houston Outreach Program began with a blank canvas and a native Houstonian serving as the parent and family outreach coordinator. The coordinator's responsibilities include facilitating authentic conversations with Houston community members and listening. These thoughtful conversations have developed into partnerships and collaborations around hazing prevention in the Houston community which continue to grow.

To build the relationships with the Houston community, the program coordinator has hosted educational events with high school administrators, parents, alumni, students, and community groups. Within the first six months of outreach, students and parents from 25 high schools participated in the program targeting the 2019 admitted freshman class. This program, geared towards hazing awareness and prevention, came together with the support and collaboration from the directors of college counseling of several Houston high schools. Attendees learned about the value of sororities and fraternities at UT Austin, including high academic grade point averages, community service, and philanthropy. Attendees are also updated about the Texas anti-hazing law, the research on hazing and hazing prevention, and the UT Austin campus resources available to both parents and students. As the program has evolved, it adapted to the needs of the community. As a result, in addition to high schools, partnerships have been created with PTA organizations, parents, business groups, local nonprofit organizations, the UT alumni center, and the UT Austin Houston Admissions Center.

At the outset, the university anticipated push back from parents about the hazing conversation, but there has been very little, indicating that perhaps parents are more aligned with their students than initially thought. Rather, they just needed someone to start a candid conversation with them about hazing prevention.

"This program has been innovative and needed for a long time," says Suzanne Stiles, Houston parent, PTA president of Memorial High School, and president of the Houston Alumnae Panhellenic Association. "One of the things about college that concerns parents the most is high-risk behavior. Starting those conversations while students are still at home is a key piece to starting an open dialogue between students and parents."

Stiles added, "If the parents buy-in to hazing prevention and other high-risk behaviors, their high school students will follow. I have seen a very positive response to the program. Parents feel a greater sense of calm when they receive education."

Two years into the program, engagement is growing across the Houston community. Administrators, parents, and students from more than 35 high schools are currently participating. They receive quarterly newsletters with national and university news, research about hazing and hazing prevention, and information regarding upcoming events.

Another takeaway, as the program has gained traction, has been understanding the various community needs. This understanding fosters trust between the community, program staff, and the university. As a result, parents and community members have been more willing to listen to the research and more open to engage in the hazing prevention conversation. The program coordinator has worked to listen and build trust by meeting with each school and hosting lunch-and-learn events for Houston area high school directors and college counselors. During these events, they provide their perspectives, insight to their high school communities, and describe what needs are for their students and parents.

There are many similar needs across high schools when it comes to hazing prevention education but understanding the nuances of each high school is where the program has its greatest impact. For example, the dynamics are very different from an all-boys school as opposed to an all-girls school; or a school composed of prospective first-generation college students than a school populated with sorority and fraternity legacies.

"The awareness piece is key, especially with parents who are either unfamiliar [with sororities and fraternities] or their perceptions are not current," says Jeff Fuller, director of college counseling at Strake Jesuit College Preparatory. "Educating the parents is an ongoing need because most of the time families are not thinking about [high risk behaviors] until they are put into that situation. This outreach effort by UT Austin ignites an opportunity to have a deep conversation between students and parents before college," he adds.

Future collaborations include efforts to expand education and training to youth serving in mentor or influential leadership positions. Additionally, a three-part series working with the community leaders of one of Houston's largest churches will educate youth ministers and mentors about hazing and hazing prevention and will provide resources to students and parents when they need support. Another forthcoming collaboration is with a Texas summer camp. This program will educate the camp counselors and better position them as a resource for campers.

The current program goal is to broaden the subject matter from an exclusive focus on sororities and fraternities to include all 1,000 UT Austin student organizations. Thereafter, the plan is to grow the program so that all major Texas cities receive this form of outreach, and eventually, the final goal is to invite other Texas universities to join in the outreach efforts.

There is ample national and university research that supports the concept of educating a community about high-risk behavior prevention before students reach the college age. The sociological findings from a two-year ethnographic study, conducted in conjunction with this program and lead by Susana McCollom, professional ethnographer and chaplain, revealed perspectives about hazing have changed.

Per McCollom, "Many fraternity members are rethinking what it means to be 'the best version of themselves.' These young men are outgrowing an old image, and they are ready for a conversation that includes spirituality and introspection."

The study also found that to effectively impact high-risk behaviors, all the players in the community must be onboard, especially the parents; however, the research revealed parents were not fully informed about hazing on college campuses. As noted by Dr. Allen, parents needed to understand the current college student did not want hazing and other high-risk behaviors to be a part of their collegiate experience. "I think the social scene with fraternities, sororities, and spirit groups is a toxic environment that I have not enjoyed being a part of," said a University of Texas at Austin student in the Hazing Prevention Consortium Survey. College students want their experience to be different from what their parents want for them or what parents think their students want.

As highlighted in "iGen: Why Today's Super Connected Kids Are Growing Up Less Rebellious, More Tolerant, Less Happy-and Completely Unprepared for Adulthood" by Jean Twenge, Ph.D., parents' influence on their students is a crucial education piece with outreach efforts; however, parents and alumni can also impede progress. Universities grapple with the perceived and real traditions deeply ingrained in the sorority/fraternity system, competing against the research and cultural shift on college campuses that no longer supports hazing. This is a big challenge to overcome, from the student affairs perspective, and remains a main point of discussion in the program's narrative when working with students and parents.

Based on the McCollom's ethnographic study, it's necessary that parents buy into the hazing prevention research. This is one of the central objectives of the Houston Outreach Program, and progress has been made on this front. To date, we know audiences consistently leave with these takeaways:

- How to recognize hazing
- Where to seek support and how to report hazing
- Acknowledging that a cultural shift against hazing exists on campus
- How to access to campus resources available to parents and to students
- Understanding the details of Texas Anti-Hazing laws
- Hazing is a health and safety issue

It would be remiss not to mention how the pandemic has impacted university and student affairs outreach efforts. On one hand, this is an opportunity to change hazing behaviors, cast off old traditions, and bring forth innovative ways for sororities/fraternities to connect with new members in a virtual environment. On the other, there are concerns about how hazing might manifest in new ways during this pandemic with the virtual dimension as well as the strong desire to continue to gather in person added into the equation.

"I am proud that our university is committed to shifting the culture around high-risk behavior," shared Dr. Lilly. "Furthermore, our supportive alumni and generous donors are critical partners to help increase awareness about hazing prevention while supporting the healthy traditions that are sacred to our sororities and fraternities."

As it turns out, it does take a village.

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Adrienne Murphrey serves as the parent and family outreach coordinator for sorority and fraternity life in the Office of the Dean of Students at the University of Texas at Austin. She coordinates the Sorority and Fraternity Life Houston Outreach Program which explores the student organization experience, the changing climate on college campuses, and the prevention of high-risk behaviors. This original, community-based program is specifically geared toward high school students, their families, high school administrators, and local UT Austin alumni.